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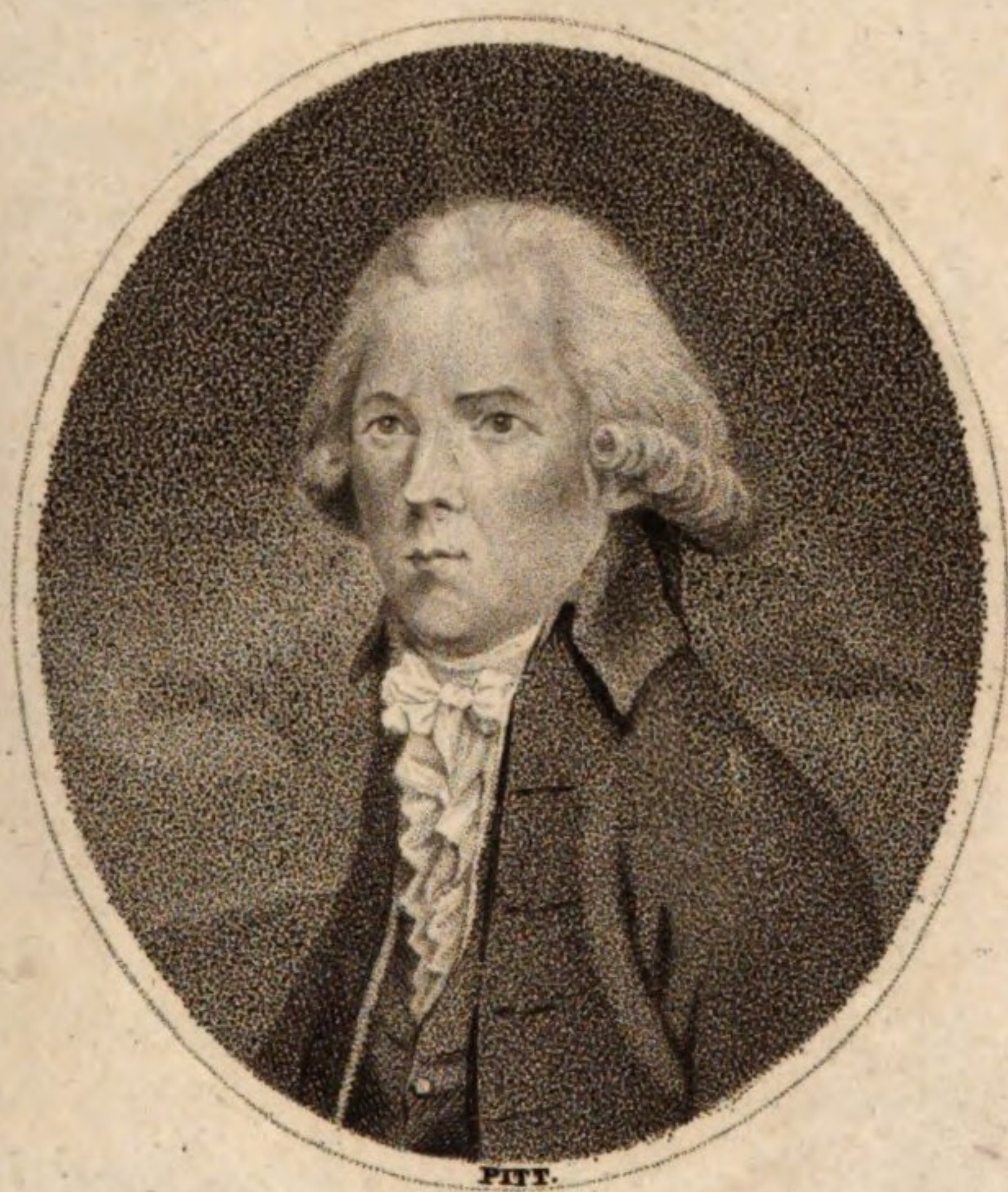
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CHARACTERS
OF
The R^{ght} Hⁿ Wⁿ
PITT,
(and Rⁿ Bⁿ Sheridan)



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THE RIGHT HONOURABLE

WILLIAM PITT.

To attempt the delineation of the life and character of a man so lately at the head of public affairs, is a task attended with considerable difficulties, for not only are all the great political measures, of which he was the author, still fresh in our recollection, but the impulse they have given his country still continues to act upon it with considerable force; hence although the immediate effects of Mr. Pitt's policy may be a subject on which all agree, considerable difference of opinion may arise as to the future benefits or evils likely to result from it, and the biographer who attempts to calculate them, may incur the charge of rashness, or be condemned as the tool of a faction.

Whatever the cast of politics with which our minds may be tinctured, every one must allow that the subject of the present memoir, during the time he presided over the councils of Great Britain, was in many points of view the most conspicuous prime minister that modern Europe ever beheld; whether he be considered in respect to his splendid talents, the success of his financial operations, or the singular events which occurred during his administration. His history will include the annals of the most remarkable epoch in modern times; and he will be justly deemed by

future ages, the master-spring which gave motion to the proceedings of all the cabinets of Europe. A large share of the good or evil which may result, will be solely ascribed to his councils. In short, he may be considered as uniting the striking qualities of the Richelieus, the Mazarines, the Straffords, the Alberonis, and the Walpoles; for to none of these is he inferior either in abilities or in eloquence.

England never had a minister of whom such different opinions have been entertained as of the late one, and indeed no other was ever placed in such critical circumstances. In short, the memorable history of this statesman, comprising, as it necessarily must, a review of his political operations, will be resorted to, at some future period, as one of the most interesting and instructive performances that can occupy the attention of mankind.

William Pitt, the illustrious Earl of Chatham, had three sons, of whom the late minister is the youngest. He was born May 8, 1759, at a time when his father's glory was at its zenith; and when, in consequence of the wisdom of his councils, and the vigour and promptitude of his decisions, British valour reigned triumphant in every part of the globe.

On the accession of his present majesty, that great statesman, in consequence of new arrangements, chiefly occasioned by the rising influence

of the Earl of Bute, retired from the station which he had so honourably filled; and consigning his other sons to the care of others, he devoted his own time to the education of WILLIAM, on a sanguine persuasion, as he was in the habit of saying, that « he would one day increase the « glory of the name of PITT. »

His classical knowledge Mr. Pitt acquired under the care of a private tutor at Burton-Pynsent, the seat of his father; and the Earl took great pleasure in teaching him, while still a youth, to argue with logical precision, and to speak with elegance and force. He judiciously accustomed him to the practice of making accurate inquiries respecting every subject that caught his attention, and taught him not to remain satisfied with a superficial observation of appearances.

These lessons brought him into an early practice of cool and patient investigation, rarely, if ever, acquired by those who prefer the trappings of eloquence, and the shewy ornaments of language, to plain sober diction, and pertinent matter of fact.

Under such an able paternal guide, an acute mind could not fail to imbibe a store of sound practical knowledge. The earl, with his usual perspicuity, fancied he saw in his son a future statesman, and, in all probability, a future minister of his country also. It was a laudable ambition in a father, and to gratify it he spared no

exertions ; directing his whole attention to the great object of rendering his son accomplished in all things requisite to form a public character, and to preserve the lustre already attached to the name of WILLIAM PITT.

He himself frequently entered into disputations with him, and encouraged him to converse with others, upon subjects far above what could be expected from his years. In the management of these arguments, his father would never cease to press him with difficulties; nor would he permit him to stop, till the subject of contention was completely exhausted. By being inured to this method, the son acquired that quality which is of the first consequence in public life—a sufficient degree of firmness, and presence of mind, as well as a ready delivery, in which he was wonderfully aided both by nature and education.

That he might enjoy all the benefits of instruction which his country could give him, and, at the same time, by a rapid progress in the preliminary studies, qualify himself early for the senate, he was taken, at between fourteen and fifteen years of age, from his father's roof, and the care of a very enlightened and worthy clergyman, Mr. (now Dr.) Wilson, and sent to Pembroke college, Cambridge, where he was admitted under the tuition of Messrs. Turner and Prettyman, both very able men, and willing to second, to the utmost of their power,

the intentions of his father. Mr. Prettyman was also his private instructor, and a better choice could not have been made, as far as classical and mathematical knowledge were concerned. For eloquence he could not look up to either of his instructors; but his father's example and precepts required no further assistance on that head.

In Cambridge he became a model to the young nobility and fellow-commoners; and it was not doubted that, if the privileges of his rank had not exempted him from the usual exercises for the bachelor's degree, he would have been found among the first competitors for academical honours. On his admission, according to custom, to his master's degree, the public orator found it needless to search into his genealogy; or even to dwell much upon the virtues of his father, for the eyes of the university were fixed on the youth; the enraptured audience assented to every encomium, and each breast was filled with the liveliest presages of future greatness. To the honour of Mr. Pitt it must be spoken, that he has been duly sensible of the care taken of his rising years. His tutors have received repeated marks of his acknowledgment. Dr. Wilson, his first instructor, is now canon of Windsor; and one of his sons has a lucrative sinecure in Jamaica. The worthy Dr. Turner is Dean of Norwich; Dr. Prettyman has received the Bishopric of Lincoln, and the Deanery of St.

Paul's, and will, doubtless, not be overlooked in future promotions.

Mr. P. was afterwards entered a student of Lincoln's Inn, and made so rapid a progress in his legal studies, as to be soon called to the bar, with every prospect of success.

We are informed, that he went once or twice upon the Western circuit, and appeared as junior counsel in several causes. He was, however, destined to fill a more important station in the government of his country, than is usually obtained through the channel of the law.

At the general election, 1780, we find him nominated by some of the most respectable persons in Cambridge as a candidate to represent that university; but notwithstanding the high character he had obtained there, he found very few to second his pretensions. In the following year, however, he was returned for the borough of Appleby, by the interest of Sir James Lowther. On taking his seat in the House of Commons, he enlisted himself on the side of the party which had constantly opposed the minister, Lord North, and the American war, and which regarded him with a degree of veneration; recognising in his person the genius of his illustrious father, revived and acting, as it were, in him.

The representation of the people of Great Britain in Parliament, so much extolled by foreigners,

who, dazzled by its surface, took no pains to investigate the substance, which had made such rapid strides towards decay under the corrupt administration of Sir Robert Walpole, and the nullity of which, to any good or useful purpose, had been so recently proved by the King of England having forced his subjects into a most unjust and unpopular war, was one of the first subjects to which Mr. Pitt called the attention of the house. Notwithstanding however the absurdity inseparable from the idea of the Parliament reforming itself, or in other words, its members voting themselves out, when many of them had been at such an enormous expence to get in, an absurdity which Mr. Pitt felt as clearly as any man, he nevertheless knew that his motion for a committee to inquire into the state of the representation, though unsuccessful, would tend in a great measure to create for him that popularity, without which his future schemes of greatness would prove as short-lived as those of his predecessors; but, once attained, would enable him to use the unsuspecting confidence of the multitude, in order to carry into effect the most daring projects of ambition and aggrandizement. Although therefore Mr. Pitt's propositions for a committee were, as he had previously calculated on, rejected; he repeated and renewed them from time to time, and even out of the house was one of the principal members of a society, instituted for the sole purpose of obtaining a reform in

parliament, together with the Duke of Richmond, and many others actuated by the same motives as himself, and who promised themselves a similar reward.

On the death of the Marquis of Rockingham, the old Whig party fell into a state of disunion, nearly bordering upon dissolution. A new arrangement took place soon after, and Lord Shelburne became the first Lord of the Treasury, assisted by Mr. Pitt, who astonished the country, and, indeed, all Europe, by the phenomenon of a Chancellor of the Exchequer at the age of *twenty-three*!

His popularity at this period effectually screened him from every charge which his youth and inexperience might justly have warranted, and which were strongly urged against him by the adverse faction. The situation of the country was extremely critical. The American war had become generally odious; and all hearts panted for a cessation of hostilities. This desirable object was, therefore, the first consideration with the new ministry.

The combined powers had recently experienced great humiliations, and consequently the opportunity was not to be lost. A general peace accordingly took place, but the terms of it were reprobated by a considerable part of the nation. On this occasion, Mr. Pitt delivered a most masterly defence of himself and his colleagues,

which produced a corresponding, though not successful effect. The administration, of which he was one of the most distinguished members, was therefore, short-lived. On its dissolution, the young statesman withdrew into retirement, and afterwards went abroad for some time, visiting Italy, and several of the German courts.

On the coalition-ministry coming into place, Mr. Mansfield's seat for the university became vacant, by his accepting the office of solicitor-general, and Mr. Pitt determined to oppose him: with this view he went down to Cambridge; but was treated with contempt, by the heads and senior members. One almost threw the door in his face, and wondered at the impudence of the young man, thus to come down and disturb the peace of the university! From such a scene he retired in a few days, in disgust; though the assurances of support from several independent masters of arts, kept alive the scanty hopes of future success. A few months, however, changed the scene; the coalition-ministry was thrown out, he repaired in triumph to the university, was received with open arms, carried his election by means of a considerable majority, and was able, also, by his influence, to make Lord Euston his colleague. For a time, the tergiversation of the senate was a theme of conversation; the most notorious of the gown who had changed sides were marked by the contempt of the unsuccessful,

but they laughed at their own disgrace, being gratified by the rewards of the successful candidates; mitres, stalls, and livings, became the portion of the Cambridge men. But few of the independent masters, who would have supported him when out of power, and did so on his accession to the ministry, were to be found among his voters at the next election; they considered him as having receded from those principles of liberty, on which he had first acted; for he had now become cool in his zeal for that reform of parliament, which had, in conjunction with his great talents, first entitled him to their notice.

An occasion, as we have just remarked, suddenly offered, in 1784, for bringing Mr. Pitt forward once more on the great theatre of politics, as a candidate for fame and power. The British dominions in India had long been in an alarming situation, and it was generally admitted that an immediate remedy was indispensably necessary to preserve them. With this view, Mr. Fox, then Secretary of State, formed, digested, and brought forward his famous India bill, which, after considerable discussion, passed through both houses, but so powerful were the machinations of the *secret cabinet* against it, that the king refused his consent, and blushed not to set his own opinion in direct contradiction to a measure sanctioned by the opinion of the nation at large.

The coalition-ministry, including in its ranks Mr. Fox, Mr. Burke, Mr. Sheridan, and some of the most distinguished members of the old administration, formed such a combination of talents and genius as had been seldom seen before, and has never been witnessed since; the benefits too were incalculable which the country would in all probability have derived from this union amongst men who had hitherto acted in opposition to each other; hence it was so much the more dreaded by the *secret cabinet*. Lord North and many of those who acted with him brought almost to the brink of destruction by the American war, were convinced of the error they had fallen into; this circumstance, added to the tried integrity of their new associates, was sufficient to provoke regal jealousy; it was feared that the coalition-ministry had it in contemplation to relieve the whole body of dissenters from the disabilities they had hitherto laboured under, and thus extend to them the same privileges as are enjoyed by those of his majesty's subjects professing the religion of the Church of England. It was apprehended, and with reason, that the ministry would not easily consent to an augmentation of his majesty's civil list, whilst the people were still labouring under the heavy burdens which the late war had laid upon them, and lastly, the *secret cabinet* itself trembled for its existence at the bold and dignified resolution of the house of commons, that *the*

influence of the Crown had increased, was increasing, and ought to be diminished. Royal authority could brook no more. Lord North and his allies were dismissed in a most unconstitutional manner, and Mr. Pitt appointed the new premier, assisted by the advice of Lord Thurlow, as keeper of the great seal—arrangements which, at that time, were however, only considered as temporary.

As Mr. Pitt has been one of the boldest and most pertinacious opposers of Mr. Fox's India-bill, it was naturally to be thought that he would embrace the first opportunity of his return to power, to propose one of his own. He accordingly did so, undaunted at the formidable difficulties inseparable from such a measure at this period; well acquainted with the reasons which had influenced his Majesty to refuse his assent to that of his adversary, he formed his own upon the superstructure of that secret influence which would render it palatable to the monarch, however injurious to the interests of the nation. Mr. Fox well aware of the despotism which a governor in chief of India might exercise over the inhabitants of that distant, though vast and extensive country, were he possessed of full and discretionary authority, had by his bill formed a board of control, on the members of which he bestowed a share of the power in such a manner, that they might act as guardians of the laws, and operate as a check

upon the governor, whenever he should be inclined to step beyond them, to gratify either his ambition or his avarice. The assent of two thirds of the board of control was likewise essentially necessary to be obtained, before a war could be declared against any of the native powers. Mr. Pitt's bill, on the contrary, invested the governor general of India with full and discretionary authority, and though it likewise admits of a board of control, the members composing it possess little or no influence over the operations of the governor in chief, who is responsible only to the cabinet of St. James's. Mr. Pitt, however, had not yet taken the necessary means to secure the assent of the house by filling it with his own party; accordingly he had the mortification to find a majority against him, and was then placed in the peculiar situation of a minister acting with a minority, and that too in opposition to the strongest conflux of talents ever combined against any administration. He, however, remained firm in his seat amidst a general confusion; and, though the house had petitioned his majesty to dismiss him and his coadjutors, our young premier ventured to inform the representatives of the nation, that their petition could not be complied with!

The struggle between the commons and the crown was of the greatest importance; as the latter however possessed the means of influencing

almost every election in the kingdom, it was not difficult to foresee how it would end. On the old parliament being dissolved, a new one was returned more obedient to the will of the monarch and which preserved the young favorite in his post (1).

To enter into a detail of all the public measures which the ex-minister brought forward during an administration of fifteen years, would far exceed the bounds of this memoir. We shall content ourselves with noticing some of the most prominent ones, bestowing on each as we proceed, its merited share of applause or disapprobation, and, laying aside all political attachments, we shall be guided in our observations by truth alone. *Amicus Plato, amicus Socrates, sed magis amica veritas.*

Thanks to the corruption of modern times, the money of the treasury, vulgarly called that of the nation, had been employed to so good a purpose, that on the opening of the new parlia-

(1) A day or two after Mr. Pitt was re-elected one of the members for the University, a sermon was preached before him by Dr. Parr. As there happened at that time to be a good many benefices vacant, the church was crowded with the university sophs and fellows, all looking up to the young premier for preferment. The reverend Dr. wishing to chuse a text suitable to the occasion, took it from the 7th chapter of St. John. « *There is a lad here that hath five loaves and three small fishes, but what are they among so many?* »

ment, Mr. Pitt, found his arguments almost superfluous to convince the house of the propriety of a measure which it had so lately rejected; accordingly, his India-bill now passed by a vast majority and immediately received the royal sanction. The effects which have ensued from it in the British possessions in the East, are at length visible to all mankind. That authority which, had it been subject to the check of a board of control, chosen from amongst the most enlightened inhabitants there, having a permanent interest in the welfare of the country, might have rendered it the abode of peace and happiness, by being arbitrarily concentrated in the governor in chief, has given him the power of gratifying the ambition and cupidity both of himself and his adherents, by waging continual wars on the natives which have never ceased to the present moment. These wars may have indeed afforded plunder to those concerned in them, both at home and abroad; but on the other hand the devastated plains of India; the starvation and murders of millions of its inhabitants, proclaim to the world the crimes of its oppressors. In another point of view the short sighted policy of this bill is as evident as its injustice; the day is not far distant when the governor general of the British possessions in India, having reduced the surrounding provinces to servitude, will bestow a portion of that authority on the inhabitants,

which they can obtain by no other means, and then casting off for ever all allegiance to the mother country, proclaim an East Indian republic.

The next important step in Mr. Pitt's administration was the commercial treaty he concluded with France. It was an honourable and advantageous one to his country, and happy would it have been for Great Britain had he always directed the political and mercantile knowledge he has displayed in it, to similar objects.

In 1788, the all-conquering arms of Catharine the great, carried Ockzakow by storm, from the Turks; with whom she then happened to be at war; the possession of the place was legalized by the laws of arms, but as it did not precisely square with Mr. Pitt's idea of a balance of power in Europe, which has always been a very favourite notion of this statesman, he gave instructions to the British ambassador at St. Petersburg, to make remonstrances to the empress, on this account, threatening her with the vengeance of Great Britain, in case she refused issuing orders to evacuate it. The absurdity, however, of plunging the country into a war, in which it had not the most distant interest, and from which it could not promise itself the slightest advantage, nay, wherein national sympathy itself could not take a part with the conquered, were reasons so forcibly felt, that when Mr. Pitt proposed an augmentation of the navy, for the purpose of sailing

up the sound, and battering down the walls of St. Petersburg, he found his usually triumphant majority shrunk to 88. The British nation, however bold and warlike, seldom chuses to venture into a contest where nothing but *cold iron* is promised to the victors; and as no better reward was held out for undertaking the present one, Mr. Pitt was forced to relinquish his scheme, and cloak his resentment, when the empress declared she would not evacuate Ockzakow, and that he might do his worst.

Soon after this event an occasion arose, which put to the proof the sincerity of those professions, that originally gained our young statesman a seat in the house of commons. Petitions were presented from Birmingham, Manchester, Sheffield, etc. etc. praying for a reform in the representation. The petitioners set forth, that notwithstanding their immense population, and the great stake they had in the welfare of the country, being some of the richest manufacturers in it, they sent not a single member to Parliament, whilst on the other side, Old Sarum and a vast number of other rotten boroughs, not containing more than a few houses each, sent two members, and even then the nomination notoriously lay with the ministry: this they offered to prove by evidence at the bar of the house, and also, that owing to various causes, *two thirds of the members sitting there were returned directly or indirectly*

under the influence of the minister. This motion for referring the petition to a committee, was brought forward by Mr. Grey, one of the greatest independent landholders in England, who earnestly and forcibly called upon Mr. Pitt to support the petition, by reminding him of his former sentiments; but alas! to little purpose. Our wary politician, who had gulled the people with his projects of reform, when they served him as steps in the ladder of ambition, had no sooner ascended its utmost height, than he kicked them from under him, and laughed at their credulity. The premier, in one of those specious delusory speeches he knows so well how to make, taking especial care to avoid meeting the petitioners on their own grounds, attempted to reprobate the idea of men complaining of the defects of the constitution, when the increasing commerce and manufactures of the country bore witness to the benefits they enjoyed under it; that of all times none could be more unseasonable to demand a reform in the representation, than at a period when the riches and prosperity of the kingdom excited the admiration and envy of all others, etc. Very few, however, were deluded by these wily arguments; the grand majority of the nation well knew, that their riches and prosperity sprung from their own enterprize and industry, and that for neither one or the other were they indebted to a rotten representation, though they prospered

in spite of it. The debate on this interesting question lasted for three days, at the end of which, as it may be expected, the petition was thrown out.

A very alarming circumstance now took place, which threatened a premature end to the projects of our statesman; it was the declared lunacy of his majesty; and here it cannot be denied but that Mr. Pitt stood on grounds more delicate, than perhaps any of his predecessors. The question to be decided was, whether the prince of Wales had a constitutional right to the regency, unshackled by limitations, or whether the right existed in the house of commons to impose limitations on him. Mr. Pitt boldly declared himself of the latter opinion, urging with great justice that the revolution of 1688 had rendered the crown elective, and consequently, that whenever the sovereign authority ceased its functions, the representatives of the people had a right even to choose a king, *a priori*, therefore, had they a right to limit the exercise of his authority, a right triumphantly proved by the example of William III. We are far from wishing to detract from the praise so truly due to the conduct of the ex-minister on this trying occasion; but we may be permitted to remark, that personal considerations were probably not without their influence on it. Mr. Pitt had long been at open war with the friends of the prince of Wales, and to

the latter he was personally obnoxious. Had the prince therefore been seated on the throne with the same powers as his father, Mr. Pitt's fall was inevitable; whereas, by imposing restrictions on him, or in other words, associating the queen with the prince in the regency, the premier flattered himself with preserving at least part of his influence. Contrary to general expectation, the king recovered, and Mr. Pitt beheld himself and his colleagues more firmly seated in power than ever.

The next and most important scene in which our statesman took a leading part, was now fast approaching. The revolution in France burst on men's minds with a suddenness, that for some time astounded the politicians of the old school. They had not calculated on so great an event, still less were they able to foresee its consequences. No sooner, however, had the friends of liberty in England begun to manifest their rejoicings at the downfall of tyranny in France, and sent addresses to the friends of freedom there, congratulating them on the benefits conferred on their country by the constituent assembly, than the aristocracy in England awoke from their slumber, and took the alarm. The abolition of titles and tithes, the establishment of a free and equal representation of the people, together with the decreed eligibility of persons of all persuasions, to hold the offices of state, in a country so near to their own, they regarded as extremely dan-

gerous; the infection might spread, and should similar events take place in their own country, they well knew, that, deprived of their privileges, their talents alone would never ensure them a preeminence. The fears of the English government increased in proportion as the people gave a loose to their joy; and no sooner were corresponding societies, for the purpose of obtaining a reform in parliament, established throughout the kingdom, than it beheld, or fancied it beheld, its danger. Cabinet councils were held every day, and prolonged to an unusual length. In the mean time it was resolved, that France should be regarded as a house on fire, and every means be adopted to cut off the communication with it.

There are some who have been of opinion, that had Mr. Pitt contented himself with this step, and confined himself to rigorously enforcing the alien bill, traitorous correspondence bill, etc. he might have steered clear of those calamities which his after conduct was the means of bringing on his country: but an examination of causes and effects will by no means justify such reasoning. In the natural effervescence of men's minds at that period, it was morally impossible to prevent that reciprocation of sentiment between the citizens of Great Britain and France, which Mr. Pitt thought proper to denominate traitorous, whilst the two nations were in a state of peace. It is not, therefore, meant to be denied, but that had

that peace lasted, the same privileges accorded to the people in France must have been granted to those in England; this was not the interest of the governors of the latter country, many of whom must have returned to their original insignificance in consequence. Conscious of this, they resolved that the dangerous example should be *annihilated*, or in other words, that liberty should be banished out of Europe, and France cease to exist as an independent nation; that her spoils should be divided amongst the potentates of the earth, and despotism under some specious name be henceforth declared the order of the day. All negotiation was therefore haughtily rejected, the French ambassador ignominiously dismissed, and war declared against France.

To enter into all the events which have occurred during the course of that calamitous conflict, would lead us into too great a length. We shall content ourselves with making a few observations on the objects Mr. Pitt calculated the war would effect, and the contrary results it has produced. France, instead of being annihilated as an independent nation, has not only increased her population by one fifth, but become the most formidable power in Europe, with her civil and religious liberty seated on firmer foundations than ever. The liberty of the people of England, indeed, Mr. Pitt has, to every good and useful purpose, destroyed. In this object he has undoubt-

edly succeeded. He boasted of having made war against the French finances, and yet they were never in a more flourishing state. Mr. Pitt threatened to reduce the French to a national bankruptcy, and yet strange to say, long before the war closed, the bank of England stopped payment, and has never since been able to discharge its own notes! At the end of this ten years war, then, Great Britain found her population thinned, her liberty gone, her debt nearly trebled, and herself on the « very verge of » that « bankruptcy, » which Mr. Pitt so often predicted to France!

Having now seen how opposite was the result of the war, to the prospects which Mr. Pitt held out at its commencement, it will be necessary for us in some measure to trace back our steps, and take a short review of those measures of internal policy pursued by the late premier, during the period of that calamitous contest in which he wantonly involved his country. Scarcely was it begun, than he openly announced his intentions of destroying freedom at home, whilst he was subsidizing foreign powers to exterminate it abroad. Accordingly his first step was to introduce an act for abolishing all the debating societies throughout the kingdom, where the discussion of subjects of morality, politics, and philosophy, tended to inform and enlighten the rising generation, societies for the diffusion of know-

ledge, and schools for the exertion of eloquence, where some of our first orators first learnt to exercise those talents which afterwards rendered them the admiration and astonishment of their fellow-citizens. So strict indeed was the law, which still subsists, that in Great Britain, the supposed asylum of liberty, it rendered the meeting of more than twelve men together illegal, unless they had previously obtained a licence from the magistrates. Still this was not sufficient; Mr. Pitt thought he had not done enough for the cause of tyranny, while any thing remained undone; he had the audacity to propose, and found a house of commons corrupt enough, to pass a suspension of the dearest birthright of Britons, the Habeas Corpus act, which suspension he immediately availed himself of, by causing some of the most worthy and enlightened citizens to be snatched from their families and occupations, conveyed to the Tower, and after nine months seclusion there, brought out only to be arraigned of the crime of HIGH TREASON. Although they had been guilty of no other than that of pursuing precisely the same plans of parliamentary reform, of which he had in the outset of his political career, been the most strenuous supporter. But though he had marked out his victims, to the honour of British integrity be it spoken, there were no priests to be found who would sacrifice them at the altar. In vain did the Attorney-general exert his utmost

effrontery, and exhaust all the sophistry of his profession in a speech of nine hours in length, in the vain attempt to confound the understanding of an English jury, by telling them it was criminal to think of reforming a constitution, when there was so good a king at the head of it; they smiled contempt at such a perversion of language, and acquitted the prisoners. Amongst this chosen band who had been marked out for the scaffold, was the illustrious and venerable John Horne Tooke, whose whole life had been a continued struggle in favour of freedom, and the discriminating powers of whose mind burst forth with such splendour, when his life was yet hanging in suspense, that they overwhelmed with confusion even the minister himself (1).

Become by this time as much the hatred and detestation of the people, as in the outset of his career he had been their idol, Mr. Pitt now began to tremble for his personal safety; eager therefore to shelter himself from an impeachment, he caused bills of indemnity to be passed, which under pretence that all he and his colleagues had done had been for the good of the state, shielded them from immediate prosecution, though it can never shield their infamy from mankind.

(1) Mr. Pitt on this occasion so completely *lost all recollection* of his former exertions in favour of parliamentary reform, that neither the court, or counsel for the prisoner, could get any information from him concerning it.

Disappointed and enraged at the failure of his tyrannical and blood-thirsty projects in England, he cast his eyes over the land of Hibernia. Long had that country groaned under an oppression, which it was the wonder of surrounding nations, it had supported so long; yet no sooner did its inhabitants appoint a deputation to lay a statement of the grievances they had laboured under, before their governors, than the satellites of despotism were let forth on them, martial law and free quarters proclaimed, and torture employed to extort from innocence a confession of guilt. But it happened in this prosecution of opinions as in that of most others, the parties only remained more firmly convinced of the justice of their cause.

Mr. Pitt had for a long time past employed every engine of power and intrigue amongst the members of the Irish parliament, and had in too many instances proved successful in corrupting their integrity: a prudent distribution of offices to some, and bestowals of titles on others, had in many cases rendered them obedient servants of the crown; yet there were certain occasions on which even they were too stubborn to submit, or in which a regard to their personal safety rendered it too dangerous for them to do so. The bold and daring idea therefore now presented itself to the mind of our statesman, to annihilate at one blow all the liberty in Ireland, by abolishing its parliament. Unbaffled by his first defeat, he

returned to the charge a second time, and having already found force unavailing, over the minds of a generous and high spirited people, the wily deceiver now cajoled their credulity, by promising them that if they would consent to a union with Great Britain, their civil and religious liberties should be restored. Worn down by the general calamities and distresses brought on them by their oppressors, they caught at any hope of removing them, and in an unguarded moment signed the death warrant of their country!

But in proportion as the ex-minister was shackling and annihilating liberty at home, he had the mortification to perceive that all his attempts, joined with those of the coalesced powers for the same purpose abroad, were now become more fruitless and absurd than ever; the virulence and abuse he had poured on a neighbouring nation and its illustrious chief, were repaid with scorn and contempt by both. His promises had proved perfidious, and his calculations false. He had deluged Europe with blood, and was now pursued by the execration of its inhabitants. Seeing himself therefore obnoxious to all parties, since there was none that he had not deceived or sacrificed, he resolved to make at least a temporary retreat from power, and leaving the vessel of the state in the hands of his underlings, flattered himself that he should still in secret direct its helm. In this however he was once more egregiously mistaken;

authority is so soothing to the possessor, that except in virtuous minds, specious pretexts are usually found to abrogate the convention by which it was acquired. There are few, it is apprehended, who will regret that our crafty politician was over-reached in this instance, and that he fell into those snares himself, by which he had decoyed so many others. Having relinquished the sceptre of office, he retired awhile from public business, to contemplation and retirement, at his seat of Walmer-Castle, Dover. Here however his reflections could not be of a pleasing cast; public opinion told him he had wrought more evil for his country than the most abandoned and profligate minister it ever possessed, evils that scarcely a century could efface. The emigrants accused him of the massacre at Quiberon, and his complete abandonment of their cause. Did he turn his eyes across the channel for consolation, he beheld that people whom he had threatened to exterminate, increasing in population, and in spite of his intrigues and corruption, with their freedom and happiness secured by wise laws and beneficial institutions. Pursued therefore by popular complaints on one side, and offended by the sight and consideration of his enemy's prosperity on the other, he once more took his seat in the house, and on Mr. Patten's motion for censuring the ministry, he took occasion for the first time to express his disapprobation of their proceedings;

this opinion he afterwards followed up by dividing the house against them. His hostilities however have of late been conducted with much less warmth, and he is supposed to entertain the rash and presumptuous hope, of forming a league with some at least of his former associates, and again ascending the pinnacle of power. Great Britain is not however so destitute of talents and integrity, as to be forced to chuse between the iniquity of the ex-minister, and the imbecility of the present one. The actual crisis is such as demands the highest talents, combined with the strictest probity, and considering the experience the nation has had within these last eighteen years, it is sincerely to be wished that it may elevate to its tottering councils, the man whom narrow prejudices and party bigotry have so long excluded from them.

As a public speaker the ex-minister forms a direct contrast to his political opponent. Deep, subtle and refined in his arguments, his hearers at first imagine he is the only man who understands the subject; they wonder and even admire, though they do not comprehend him. Should his adversary succeed in removing the difficulties, and developing the intricacies he has artfully laid in the way of a question, then it is, when to all appearance overcome, that he shews his powers the most, and by an appeal to the passions of his auditors, to every thing dear and sacred to Britons,

he has been frequently known to confound and overcome, where he has failed to convince. It must be granted however, that in general he displays more of the acute logician than of the persuasive rhetorician; and however clear and powerful his voice, it possesses not those modulations that charm the ear and steal upon the heart. Mr. Pitt possesses an advantage, of great value to an orator, in a perfect command of temper, which has enabled him in many instances to defend his cause against his opponents, by turning their own weapons upon themselves. Hence it is he is supposed to derive that confidence, and even arrogance, which too generally pervade his speeches.

His action is not graceful, a defect that in some measure arises from the disadvantage of an exterior, which, however dignified, is far from engaging; for he is extremely tall and deficient in *embonpoint*.

It is certainly a curious circumstance that two such extraordinary men as Mr. Pitt and Mr. Fox should be as opposite in their private characters as in their public career. In debate, Mr. Fox is vehement; Mr. Pitt cool. The former is frank and open; the latter close and reserved. The urbanity of the one gains him friends among all parties; the *hauteur* and *sang froid* of the other does not conciliate even his associates.

Mr. Pitt is the same guarded and unbending

politician in his social hours as in the house of commons.

To sum up all, ambition is his idol; to it every consideration of public virtue, private friendship and political consistency, have been alternately offered up; it is most truly,

«The master-passion raging in his breast;

» Like Aaron's serpent swallowing all the rest ».

ANOTHER CHARACTER OF MR. PITT.

THE virtues of men are demonstrable only by their actions, and many a first rate genius rusts in obscurity, and dies unknown, merely for want of a powerful patron, to open an occasion of displaying it.

Not so with this person; he commenced his political career under the most auspicious omens, and neglected not the happy opportunity of attacking an unpopular and beaten Minister, when the popularity and name of his father were a tower of strength, and the nation was groaning under an incredible accumulation of taxes, in consequence of measures, which had his father's counsels been attended to, would never have been adopted.

Mr. Pitt was too keen and penetrating not to avail himself to the utmost of his peculiarly fortunate situation. Elected into parliament, without expecting it; — disappointed at Cambridge;

nor for the present, indulging his hopes further, he became a Member of parliament, by the most lucky chance (1), at a critical period, when every thing concurred to favour the talents and ambition, by which he was certainly inspired.

In his first essay as an orator, he surprised the assembly in which his oration was delivered; and the author of these pages remembers to have heard the opinion of a gentleman (2), who cannot be supposed prejudiced on that side of the question, which was, that it surpassed any thing he had ever heard from his father, even in the meridian of his glory. Far be it from us to acquiesce in such opinion, but it certainly was that of one whose judgment, when not warped, was intitled to deference and respect. In his maiden speeches he displayed that arrogance and self-sufficiency which have never forsaken him. Elated by the success of a first attempt, he immediately quitted the subaltern post, and boldly asserted his claim

(1) He was chosen for Appleby, an aristocratic borough of Lord Lauderdale, through the recommendation of old K—t—k, who had casually met him at the late Duke of Rutland's. Old K—t—k, when afterwards in the last stage of distress, labouring under the complicated misery of age and sickness, applied to Mr. Pitt for some partial relief, when this founder of his fortune received a cold answer from Dr. Pretzman, that Mr. Pitt was very sorry it was not in his power to oblige him — Mr. Pitt was never heard of at Appleby, till the day on which he was elected.

(2) Mr. Rigley.

to pre-eminence, signifying that he would never accept an inferior office in any administration. The adventurous youth was well instructed, as the event has fully proved. Disastrous circumstances paved the way to his present situation, and the name of his father, seconded by a series of extraordinary events, served to fix the fortune of his son. Pledging himself never to relinquish the duty he felt incumbent on him, of exerting all his powers to effect a reform of Parliament, and the catchword Liberty ever foremost in his mouth, while the sentiment was ever the most remote and foreign from his heart, when his confidential and appointed instructors knew his heart and principles better, he deluded the country into an opinion of his honesty, and afterwards betrayed it. Mr. Pitt is indebted for his present situation to the people, and he has (like many others) betrayed them. He has submitted it to the rod, and to that superior executive discipline which renders the boasted constitution of this country a mere farce, because it absorbs the two other parts of it.

Could it have been imagined that a young man (young men are commonly generous and high spirited) would so soon have forgot the hand that raised him? He was the pledged advocate and friend of the people. They had confidence in his pledges, and on their support he was exalted. To consider this man while a candidate for popular

trust and his conduct afterwards, what a wretched contrast does it display ! Let it not be urged that a Minister's office is arduous and difficult. The pretext is inadmissible. He acquired his situation on the firm of liberal and popular principles : it is the most infamous heresy in him to have abandoned them.

The future welfare and glory of this country is acknowledged by all its true friends, to depend on a reform in the representation of Parliament. — At present, the whole government is vested in the executive power which virtually commands the other two departments. Mr. Pitt, previous to his elevation, maintained a similar doctrine ; and to suppose a Minister, omnipotent as he is, incapable of effecting a purpose, when he is sincere and zealous in his exertions to do so, is a paradox : but Mr. Pitt is the slave, the tool of superior force. He departs from the principles of his illustrious ancestor, who never would crouch to the authority of any sovereign or cabinet, when militating against his own more enlightened judgment. He resisted and generally succeeded ; or if baffled, resigned. His son pursues far different maxims, and for ever over-ruled, still clings to the douceurs and infamy of office ; for infamous it most surely is, to practise measures his own sentiments condemn. Never did man accede to power on more just or noble principles, and never did man apostatize from them with less

reserve. He forgets all obligations, and when he might avail himself of the occasion of honourably fulfilling them, in advancing the liberty and happiness of his country, from the glorious example that we behold in France, he eternally launches out into vapid unmeaning encomiums on the boasted excellencies of the British constitution, instead of adhering to his solemn contract, of exerting all his influence and abilities to reform its blemishes. The happy moment was neglected, and extraordinary armaments prepared under the falsest and most chimerical pretences, in order to distract the minds of the people, and to divert their thoughts from the grand constitutional object—the advancement of national liberty; so that the observation of a popular writer (1) is strictly just, that in reviewing the present administration, it would appear as if wars were conjured up for the purpose of raising taxes, not taxes for supporting wars.

Were it necessary to expatiate on what is so generally known and felt, the apostacy from those popular doctrines, to which he owes his fortune and elevation, we would only mention the scandalous extension of excise laws during the space of this administration, that commenced under the auspicious promise of freedom, which have been carried to an enormous excess, that the

(1) Mr. Paine's Rights of Man.

author of the system himself (1), the father of corruption, the model of patriotism, as Mr. Burke describes him, would never have dared to think of.

We write not under the influence of prejudice, nor do we think it of the least importance who is minister of this country, unless determined to resist, and in consequence, reduce the influence of the crown, by a reform of parliament; till that period arrives, the system will be invariably the same, as we have hitherto beheld it. M. Dundas, the king's friend—the confidential adviser of Lord North, has uniformly pursued the plan laid down. He is now himself the principal machine that moves the wheels of government, the friend and secret counsellor of him who subverted the administration of his friend, Lord North. Can it then be wondered at, that he has debauched his young pupil, and that the old corrupt leaven still exists.

The public life of Mr. Pitt will afford no room for praise to the faithful and just historian. A more enlightened and unprejudiced age, when the errors of antiquity shall have lost their force, will behold his character in its native colours. He must then appear either in the light of an ungrateful hypocrite, or submit to the alternative of being reckoned a man of contracted mind.

In private life, he is not more amiable or

(1) Sir R. Walpole.

exemplary. The ministerial system that he has laid down, pervades the internal œconomy of all his actions. He appears to imagine all true dignity to consist in a coldness and reserve, that banishes every suitor from his presence; nor does he ever suffer any case of distress, however just or pressing the claims may be, to divert him from the routine of office, or to extort the least relief or comfort from himself. Negligent and careless, as he is reported to be in his domestic concerns, there is not a single ray of generosity that has ever burst forth to animate the general frost of his character. Addicted to the excesses of wine, he still retains his natural sullenness and reserve, nor in the best moments of convivial mirth does he ever display a flexibility of disposition, or openness to conviction. Often as he has been obliged to submit to the decree of necessity, yet never has he had candour to acknowledge the weakness of any measure originating in himself, that brought on that necessity. With all his failings, his caution and plausibility are admirably calculated to entrap the confidence of the landed and monied interest, and he turns it to the best account; labouring with all his zeal, to inculcate a belief of the flourishing state of the national finances; enforcing every circumstance tending to confirm this belief, and concealing every truth, that would serve to diminish or destroy it. At present, there appears little chance of resignation

or dismissal from the high eminence on which he stands; but let him retire or be dismissed, he never will be entitled to the thanks or gratitude of his country, and he will be regarded by posterity as a time-server and apostate.

M^r. SHERIDAN.

Richard Brinsley Sheridan is the third son of Mr. Thomas Sheridan, celebrated as an actor, eminent for his skill in elocution, and entitled to the gratitude of the public for his judicious and indefatigable exertions to improve the system of education in this country. His works, with the exception of some plays which he altered, and the Life of Dean Swift, which he prepared for publication, in general, relate to the elements of language, and the instruction of youth (1). His father, the Reverend Doctor Tho-

(1) List of Mr. Sheridan's principal works: — The Loyal Lover, Romeo and Juliet, and Coriolanus, all altered and acted; British Education; A Discourse delivered in the theatre at Oxford, and in the senate-house at Cambridge; A Dissertation on the Causes of the Difficulties which occur in learning the English Tongue; A Course of Lectures on Elocution; A Plan of Education for the young Nobility and Gentry of Great Britain; Lectures on the Art of Reading, in two parts; A General Dictionary of the English Language; The Works of the Rev. Dr. Jonathan Swift, Dean of St. Patrick's, arranged, revised, and corrected; Elements of English.

mas Sheridan, was a distinguished divine, the ablest school-master of his time, and the intimate friend of the Dean of St. Patrick's. Mr. Thomas Sheridan died at Margate on the 14th of August, 1788.

Mrs. Frances Sheridan, the mother of Richard Brinsley, a lady no less respected for her domestic virtues than admired for her literary attainments, was the author of *Sidney Biddulph*, a novel, which has the merit of combining the purest morality with the most powerful interest. She also wrote *Nourjahad*, an Oriental Tale, and the comedies of *the Discovery*, *the Dupe*, and *a Trip to Bath*. She died at Blois in France, the 17th of September, 1766 (1).

The subject of this memoir was born in Dorset-street, Dublin, in the month of October, 1751. He was placed, in his seventh year, with his elder brother, Charles Francis, late Secretary at War in Ireland, the correct and elegant historian of the revolution in Sweden, under

(1) Such was the respect paid to her memory by the Bishop of Blois, that he had it intimated to her friends, notwithstanding the difference of religious persuasion, that they might take advantage of the night to deposit her remains in consecrated ground, and no interruption should be given to the interment—an indulgence in France, which was perhaps never before extended to any reputed heretic. Dr. Young, in his *Night Thoughts*, bitterly complains of the different treatment which attended his daughter's burial in the same country.

the tuition of Mr. Samuel Whyte of Dublin, the friend of their father, and who has been a long time highly esteemed for his care and ability in the instruction of youth. They were the two first pupils of Mr. Whyte, who opened his academy in April 1758, and it is a circumstance not entirely unworthy of remark, that their early years afforded no promise of abilities which they have since displayed. Mrs. Sheridan, whose discrimination cannot be questioned, took an opportunity, on committing them to the care of Mr. Whyte, to advert to the necessity of *patience* in the arduous profession which he had embraced, and addressed him in the following language — « These boys will be your tutors in that respect. I have hitherto been their only instructor, and they have sufficiently exercised mine; for two such impenetrable dunces I never met with.

Having remained nearly eighteen months with Mr. Whyte, they were sent by that gentleman, in September 1759, to Mr. and Mrs. Sheridan, who then resided at Windsor. There they passed nearly a year, their education, during that time, being superintended by Mrs. Sheridan herself. Richard Brinsley was placed at Harrow-school, after the Christmas of 1762. The observation, made by his mother on the occasion, taken from one of her letters, now before the writer of this sketch, is, when connected with

his subsequent pursuits, rather of a singular kind. She says — « Dick has been at Harrow-school since Christmas; as he probably may fall into a *bustling life*, we have a mind to accustom him early to *shift for himself*. » It has been reported, but without foundation, that he gave recitations from the English classics during his father's lectures. His father, on the contrary, never entertained an idea of employing him in that manner, as his brother Charles was very much his superior in diligence, correctness of ear, and powers of voice, and was remarkable, when only eleven years old, for his elegant and impressive delivery of several passages from Milton.

The literary advancement of Mr. Sheridan at Harrow, a seminary which has sent into the world many finished scholars, and distinguished characters, appears to have been at first retarded, either by the bluntness of his powers, or the negligence of his disposition. Dr. Sumner, who was then master of the school, had probably, from his constant attention to the boys of the higher forms, no opportunity of distinguishing the talents of his pupil; and it was reserved for Dr. Parr, who was at that time one of the sub-preceptors, to discover and call into activity the faculties of young Sheridan's mind.

Richard Brinsley was at length roused from the inactivity of which his parents had so fre-

quently complained, and the rising spirit of emulation produced exertions, which admonition and the fear of correction had vainly endeavoured to excite. He felt, that to be distinguished, it was necessary to devote a considerable part of his time to study. His memory was found to be uncommonly retentive and his judgment correct; and when his mind was quickened by competition, his genius gradually expanded into that happy versatility of powers which has never deserted him. But to be admired seemed his only object, and when that end was attained, he relaxed in his application, and sunk into his former indolence. His last year at Harrow was spent more in reflecting on the acquirements he had made, and the eventful scenes of a busy life, which were opening to his view, than in enlarging the circle of his classical and literary attainments.

His father was so highly pleased with the progress his son had made in his studies, that he deemed it unnecessary to send him to the university; and he was, a short time after his departure from Harrow, entered as a student in the Middle Temple. From that period to his marriage with Miss Linley, the life of Mr. Sheridan seems involved in obscurity, which it is difficult to clear up in a satisfactory way. He certainly was not, (and this is mentioned on the authority of persons who were then on

terms of intimacy with him,) either the votary of fashion, or immersed in dissipation.

Mr. Sheridan, when about the age of twenty, was peculiarly fond of the society of men of taste and learning, and soon gave proofs that he was inferior to none of his companions in wit and argument. The sum allowed for his support must have been very small, as his father's pension from the crown (1) was barely sufficient to provide for the expences incurred by a genteel, but moderate plan of living; nor were the emoluments arising from his lectures on elocution, and his performances as an actor, very considerable. In this situation, Mr. Sheridan had recourse to his literary talents for pecuniary supplies. He had read, immediately after his leaving Harrow, with minute attention, the works of our most eminent writers, and applied himself to the study of English composition in its various branches. Nothing, however, but necessity, could have induced him to exert his powers, as Dryden and many others had done before him, for immediate profit; for, exclusively of an unaccountable propensity to indolence, which formed the distinguishing characteristic of his youthful days, and from which

(1) A pension of 200 l. per annum was granted by his Majesty, in 1762, to Mr. T. Sheridan, without solicitation, as an encouragement to complete his English Dictionary, and as a reward for his literary labours.

he cannot now be stimulated but by some great and sudden impulse, he has ever considered a mercenary writer, who is occasionally compelled to sacrifice his own conviction to the instructions of his employer, as a character truly wretched and contemptible. That he maintained his independence of sentiment there is no ground to disbelieve; but he had the prudence to conceal, from most of his acquaintance, whatever share he had in the fleeting productions of the day. He also directed his attention to the drama, as a subject, in every respect, calculated to reward his labours with fame and emolument; but disgusted with some sketches of comic character which he drew, he actually destroyed them, and, in a moment of despair, renounced every hope of excellence as a dramatic writer. A poetical translation of *Aristænetus* has been attributed to him, but the share which he had in that version was very limited.

But the views which he may have then entertained, either with respect to the cultivation and exertion of his genius in literary pursuits, or to the study of the profession to which he had been destined by his father, were all lost in a passion that mastered his reason. He at once saw and loved Miss Linley, and, from his first introduction to her, indulged the hope of triumphing over every obstacle that opposed his happiness. That lady was no less admirable for the elegant accom-

plishments of her sex and the affecting simplicity of her conversation, than for the charms of her person, and the fascinating powers of her voice. She was the principal performer in the oratorios, at Drury-lane theatre; and the science, taste, but above all, the enthusiastic feeling which she displayed in the execution of the airs assigned to her, are still remembered with delight. The strains which she poured forth were the happiest combinations of nature and of art, but nature predominated over art. Her accents were so melodious and captivating, and their passage to the heart so sudden and irresistible, that « list'ning Envy would have dropped her snakes, and stern-ey'd Fury's self would have melted » at the sounds.

Mr. Sheridan became her avowed suitor, and every idea of interest and ambition was absorbed in his passion. Her father, Mr. Linley, the late ingenious composer, was not at first propitious to his passion, and he had many rivals to overcome in his attempts to gain the lady's affections. His perseverance, however, increased with the difficulties that presented themselves, and his courage and resolution in vindicating Miss Linley's reputation from a calumnious report, which had been basely thrown out against it, obtained for him the fair prize for which he twice exposed his life.

Mr. Mathews, a gentleman then well known

in the fashionable circles at Bath, had caused a paragraph to be inserted in a public paper at that place, which tended to prejudice the character of this young lady, and Mr. Sheridan immediately applied for redress to the printer, who communicated the author's name. Mr. Mathews had, in the mean time, set out for London, and was closely pursued by Mr. Sheridan. They met and fought a duel with swords at a tavern (1) in Henrietta-street, Covent-garden. Mr Sheridan's second on the occasion was his brother, Charles Francis, the late Secretary at War in Ireland. Great courage and skill were displayed on both sides; but Mr. Sheridan having succeeded in disarming his adversary, compelled him to sign a formal retractation of the paragraph which had been published.

The conqueror instantly returned to Bath; and thinking that, as the insult had been publicly given, the apology should have equal notoriety, he caused it to be published in the same paper. Mr. Mathews soon heard of this circumstance, and, irritated at his defeat, and the use which his antagonist had made of his retractation, repaired to Bath, determined to call upon Mr. Sheridan for satisfaction. A message was accordingly sent, and a meeting agreed to: Mr. Sheridan would

(1) The house situated at the west-end of Henrietta-street, now a china-warehouse, and partly in Bedford-street.

have been justified, according to the most delicate punctilios of honour, in declining the call; but he silenced all the objections that were started by his friends, and the parties met on Kingsdown. The victory was desperately contested, and, after a discharge of pistols, they fought with swords. They were both wounded, and closing with each other, fell on the ground, where the fight was continued until they were separated. They received several wounds in this arduous struggle for life and honour, and a part of his opponent's weapon was left in Mr. Sheridan's ear.

Miss Linley did not suffer a long time to elapse before she rewarded Mr. Sheridan for the dangers he had braved in her defence, by accompanying him on a matrimonial excursion to the Continent. The ceremony was again performed, on their return to England, with the consent of the lady's parents.

From the period of her marriage, Mr. Sheridan never appeared as a public performer. Her situation in the oratorios was filled by her younger sister, (1) Miss Mary Linley. Several lucrative proposals were, about this time, made to Mrs. Sheridan to induce her once more to charm the public ear, but they were rejected

(1) This young lady died singing « I know that my Redeemer liveth. »

with disdain by Mr. Sheridan. During their residence in Orchard-street, they were subject to very distressing embarrassments; and it was not a very uncommon thing to want the necessary supplies for the day that was passing over them; yet the firmness of Mr. Sheridan, in resisting every proposal of this nature, by which any loss of estimation in the eyes of the world might be incurred, remained invincible. He received a letter from the proprietors of the Pantheon, which was then about to be opened, offering Mrs. Sheridan one thousand pounds for her performance during twelve nights, and one thousand pounds more for a benefit, the profits of which they were to appropriate to their own use. The proposal of so large a sum as two thousand pounds, which might have been gained in a few weeks, was not even politely declined, but rejected with indignation by Mr. Sheridan, notwithstanding the earnest entreaties of his wife.

Mr. Sheridan, who was now encumbered with the cares of a family, felt the necessity of immediate exertion to provide for the pressing calls inseparable from a domestic establishment, which, if not splendid, was marked with all the appearances of genteel life.

His attempt at dramatic composition, and the moderate opinion which he entertained of his talents in that respect, have been already noticed;

but his charming lines to Miss Linley, and some occasional productions, which displayed with equal happiness his talent for natural tenderness of sentiment and brilliancy of wit, had secured to him no mean reputation as a poet. Thus compelled to become a candidate for public favour, he once more resumed his courtship of the Comic Muse; and having finished his play of the *Rivals*, he presented it to the Manager of Covent-garden Theatre, and it was accordingly represented on the 17th of January, 1775. This comedy was justly considered, by candid criticism, as a most promising essay for an author in his twenty-fifth year, but the public opinion did not exactly coincide with that of acknowledged judges of dramatic merit; and, in consequence of some slight disapprobation, it was withdrawn after the first night's performance. The partial failure of the piece has been attributed to the indifferent acting of Mr. Lee, in the character of Sir Lucius O'Trigger. For that gentleman, though allowed to possess considerable merit in parts of much more importance, had not sufficiently studied the whimsical humour and national manner of Irish characters. Whatever may have been the cause, Mr. Sheridan withdrew his play without any compulsion; and, having made some judicious alterations, both in the progress of the plot and in the language, it was shortly after brought forward again, and received in the most favourable manner. E

The fable of the *Rivals* possesses a sufficient degree of probability to render it interesting; the incidents succeed each other in natural progression, and the dialogue is witty, humorous, and characteristic, interspersed with pathetic appeals to the heart, but without those extraordinary effusions of excellence which, from the pen of the same writer, have since delighted the fancy and improved the understanding, on the stage and in the closet.

Had Mr. Sheridan's powers been evinced but by this comedy only, he would have been placed at no very great distance beyond the common crowd of play-wrights.

His next production was the farce of *St-Patrick's Day*, or *The Scheming Lieutenant*, a piece evidently written more for the purpose of trying his ability to excite loud laughter and humorous merriment, than with a view of enlarging his reputation. It was presented by him to Mr. Clinch, as a testimony of his good opinion, for the assistance he had experienced from that gentleman's excellent performance of Sir Lucius O'Trigger, in the *Rivals*, in which he had succeeded Mr. Lee. The farce of *St-Patrick's Day* was actually written in eight-and-forty hours, and was performed, for the benefit of Mr. Clinch, on the 2d of May, in the same year.

At the commencement of the ensuing season,

he brought out his comic opera of the *Duenna*, a composition in every respect superior to the general class of english operas then in fashion. The plot of this pleasing piece, which deservedly retains its popularity on the stage, is simple, and incapable of producing much interest; but the elegance of the diction, the sweetness of the poetry, and the appropriate spirit infused into the characters, place it beyond all competition with the sing-song trifles which were then in high repute. The *Duenna* surpassed even the Beggars' Opera in attraction and popularity, and was performed seventy-five nights during the season, while Gay's singular production ran only sixty-five.

Mr. Sheridan's circumstances becoming about this time more independent, and his genius having struck out a line productive of fame and profit, he began to indulge in expensive entertainments, and he found no difficulty in extending his connections in fashionable life. « The feast of reason and the flow of soul » were seldom absent from the hospitalities of his house, and they were unquestionably very much promoted by the strength of argument and brilliancy of wit which he could call forth in the hours of instructive inquiry, or sportive conviviality, as well as by the charms of Mrs. Sheridan's conversation, and her fascinating powers of voice.

Mr. Garrick having resolved to retire from the management of Drury-lane Theatre, a negotiation for the purchase of his share of the patent was entered into with him by Dr. Ford, Mr. Linley, and Mr. Sheridan, who, in 1776, paid the sum of 30,000 l. for it.

It now became his interest to apply his talents in support of the theatre in which he was so materially concerned, and he immediately brought out the *Trip to Scarborough*, altered from Vanbrugh's comedy of the Relapse. It was performed on the 24th of February, 1777; and, though the dialogue was much improved, and the incidents judiciously altered, the audience did not receive it in a very favourable manner on the first night of representation, on account of the incorrectness of the performers in general. It was afterwards played to crowded houses.

His next production was the comedy of the *School for Scandal*, which has deservedly raised his fame to undisputed pre-eminence over all the contemporary dramatic-writers, and conferred, in the opinion of the foreign *literati*, a lustre on the British comedy which it did not previously possess. The *School for Scandal* was performed on the 8th of May, 1777, and attracted from that early period to the conclusion of the season, the most fashionable and numerous audiences. A play of such superior merit, and written by so young an author, was rewarded

with unqualified applause. The critics of that time were anxiously engaged in extolling the beauties with which it abounds, and some of them were not wanting to discover others, that either do not exist, or are still unknown to the writer himself. The tide of public favour ran with irresistible impetuosity, and dramatic excellence and the name of Sheridan became synonymous. But, although it must ever rank as a finished piece in the simplicity of plot, in the natural progression of incident, in the faithful imitation of manners, in the vigorous and exact delineation of living character, and, above all, in fertility of wit and felicity of expression; it is to be lamented, that the author did not apply himself with more care to improve the heart, and stimulate the public mind to the cultivation of morality.

The fashionable taste for Scandal is indeed exposed; but it is exposed to the laughter, not to the contempt and detestation, of the audience. It produces mirth, but does not excite execration. The hypocrite, who covers his abominable designs with the mask of honour and integrity, is indeed punished; but the punishment is not commensurate to the offence, and our abhorrence is weakened by the unseasonable playfulness of the poet's satire. The author is too strenuous an advocate for dissipation of manners, and the vices of libertinism are too successfully defended.

Mr. Sheridan appears, in a great measure, to have forgotten the legitimate end of dramatic composition, and not to have been sufficiently sensible, that whatever is intended for the amusement of society at large, should also be capable of communicating solid instruction, and producing real amendment. It has been remarked, with some degree of propriety, that the characters of Joseph and Charles have been taken from Fielding's *Blifil*, and *Tom Jones*; and that the disguise assumed by Sir Oliver Surface has been borrowed from a similar incident in Mrs. Sheridan's novel.

Early in the following season, he produced the musical piece of *The Camp*, a temporary *jeu d'esprit*, which afforded much entertainment; and his *Critic*, written upon the model of the Duke of Buckingham's *Rehearsal*, came out on the 30th of October, 1787. The success of the *Critic* was complete and well deserved; and, though the subject had been very ably handled by his ingenious predecessor, he succeeded in embellishing it with so great a variety of ludicrous incidents, and introduced such extraordinary novelty of satire, as to divest it of the slightest appearance of imitation.

The lamented death of the British *Roscus*, in 1779, furnished Mr. Sheridan with an opportunity of exercising powers of a very different nature; and he wrote the monody to the me-

mory of Mr. Garrick, which was recited at Drury-lane Theatre, by Mrs. Yates, in the month of March, of the same year. The sentiments are, in general, appropriate to the occasion, and the poetry possesses strength and melody.

Notwithstanding the profits which he derived from his pieces, and the share he had in the theatre, which was very considerable, as he had obtained Mr. Lacy's interest in the patent, a property equally valuable with that of Mr. Garrick, and of course worth, on the lowest calculation, thirty thousand pounds, his pecuniary embarrassments had considerably increased. His domestic establishment was not only very expensive, but conducted without any kind of regularity. The persuasions of Mr. Fox, whose friendship he had carefully cultivated, operated with a firm conviction of his own abilities, in determining him to procure a seat in the House of Commons. For some time before he had endeavoured to qualify himself for public speaking, by declaiming at the private meetings of several of his most intimate acquaintances; and it was customary with him, like the logical disputants of antiquity, to start a subject of discussion, and *advocate* either side of the question, for the purpose of exercising his ingenuity in argument.

A general election taking place in 1780, Mr. Sheridan profited of the occasion to com-

mence his political career, and accordingly offered himself as a representative for Stafford. In the adoption of this measure, he appears to have been actuated by several important considerations. The borough of Stafford was not devoted to the interest of any particular patron; it was free from all suspicion of ministerial influence, and the arts of corruption had ever tried, without effect, to undermine the independence of the electors. At least, no legal proof has been yet brought forward to establish any instance of corruption. One of the late members, who again offered himself as a candidate, had not only become unpopular, but odious, to several of the leading men of Stafford.

All these circumstances, strengthened by a pressing invitation, and a promise of the most zealous support from a principal gentleman of the place, induced Mr. Sheridan to propose himself as a candidate to represent the borough of Stafford in the next parliament. He accordingly proceeded to the spot, and was perfectly satisfied with the pleasing prospect of success that opened to his ambition. But although he experienced uncommon disinterestedness, and great liberality of conduct in the people of Stafford, a certain degree of expence which has, for a long time, blended itself with the purest proceedings of the elective system in this country, was found unavoidable, and our young politician's resources

were not in the most flourishing state. He was soon convinced, that the moderate sum of one thousand pounds was a *sine quâ non*, which alone could bring the negotiation between the new champion of liberty and the independent electors to a successful conclusion. The money was at length raised, and one of the gentlemen, who contributed to the supply, has been since liberally rewarded with an opera share.

Mr. Sheridan was accordingly returned for Stafford, and, from the moment of his introduction into the House of Commons, became a firm supporter of all the measures of opposition. Though he contented himself, in the commencement of the session, with giving a silent vote against the minister, he was indefatigable without doors in seconding the views of his party, and in exciting the clamour of public indignation against the measures of government. He constantly attended popular meetings and political clubs, and his pen was employed with success in several periodical publications. He had a considerable share in the *Englishman*, which was conducted with great acrimony against the administration of Lord North; and when the Rockingham party came into power, in 1782, his exertions were rewarded with the appointment of Under-Secretary to Mr. Fox, then Secretary of State for the Foreign Department.

The death of the Marquis of Rockingham, and

the unexpected elevation of the Earl of Shelburne to the important office of First Lord of the Treasury, completely defeated the views of opposition, and the ever-memorable coalition having been formed, Mr. Sheridan was once more called upon to carry on hostilities against the new administration. Mr. Sheridan's efforts in the cause were not supposed to be entirely confined to the House of Commons: a periodical work called the *Jesuit* soon made its appearance to which it is said, he contributed in common with the rest of his party. The energy with which this paper was written, together with the very firm and increasing opposition to the new-fangled administration, formed by the Shelburne party, were such as soon succeeded in completely overturning it. Mr. Sheridan was in consequence once more brought into place, and appointed, in April, 1783, Secretary of the Treasury.

With what effect the talents of Mr. Sheridan were exerted in the discharge of his official duties, while he filled the situations of Under-Secretary of State and Joint-Secretary of the Treasury, it is immaterial to inquire. The whole of the time which he passed in these places was not quite a year, and the chief requisites to perform the duties of them are attention, punctuality and dispatch—qualities in which his most enthusiastic admirers will hardly contend for his pre-eminence.

Until 1783, he appears to have been a figure introduced into the political picture, more for the purpose of completing the group in the background, than of standing forward as a principal character. But the irresistible impulse of genius gave a sudden expansion to his powers, extricated him from the inferior estimation in which he was held, and placed him, if not in an equal rank with Mr. Fox and Mr. Burke, at least, in the very next to it.

His defence of Mr. Fox's celebrated East-India Bill was distinguished for logical precision; and though he had not, on previous occasions, delivered his sentiments with extraordinary ability, his speech on that interesting subject was so masterly, as to induce the public opinion to select him from the second class of parliamentary speakers. In 1785, his powers began to expand in proportion to the confidence which he acquired in debate, and his observations on Mr. Pitt's Perfumery-bill were justly admired for splendid effusions of wit and great force of argument. But the part he took in the consideration of the Irish Propositions, which were brought forward during the same year, was peculiarly striking, and raised his reputation as an orator to a very superior degree. In calling the attention of the house to the fourth proposition, he displayed a general knowledge of the interests of both kingdoms, and a depth of investigation which the

most sanguine expectations of his friends could not have anticipated; and, from that moment, he was viewed as a formidable opponent by the present minister, and looked up to with admiration, as a principal leader of the party to which he belonged.

Mr. Sheridan had many difficulties to encounter in his parliamentary life. His father was an actor, he had himself largely contributed to the entertainment of the public, and was the manager of a theatre. The prejudices of mankind, however ridiculous, are too often victorious over the claims of genuine merit, and would have, perhaps, prevailed in intimidating any other person than the man against whom they were, in this instance, directed. Fully convinced of his decided superiority over birth and fortune, he proceeded, regardless of personal reflections; and if his opponents succeeded in irritating him by the asperity of their allusions, he met them with manly resolution, chastised them with the lash of legitimate satire, or held them up to universal ridicule in bursts of extemporaneous wit, that have never been equalled in the British senate. The conduct of the Premier, in his unguarded allusions to Mr. Sheridan's dramatic pursuits was severely punished; and that dignified manner which should mark the behaviour of the first statesman in Europe, sitting in the first assembly in Europe, was, for a moment,

transformed into the quarrelsome petulance of the *angry boy*. The correction was productive of salutary effects, and Mr. Sheridan has completely triumphed over the splenetic and paltry efforts of his opponents to check his talents, and degrade his public character.

He was rapidly approaching to perfection, as a public speaker, and the impeachment of Mr. Hastings supplied him with an opportunity of displaying powers which were then unrivalled, but have since rather declined than sustained themselves with equal vigour. His speech delivered in the House of Commons, in April, 1787, on the eighth article, as stated in the order laid down by Mr. Burke, relative to « money corruptly and illegally taken, » was allowed to equal the most argumentative and impassioned orations that had ever been addressed to the judgment and feelings of the British Parliament. He fixed the uninterrupted attention of the house for upwards of five hours, confirmed the minds of those who wavered, and produced co-operation from a quarter, which, it was supposed, would have been hostile to any further proceeding.

Mr. Sheridan seems, at this period, to have been convinced of the necessity of indefatigable application and persevering industry, to support the splendid fame he had acquired, and accordingly prepared himself, with unremitting assiduity,

to perform his official duties as one of the managers of the prosecution, instituted by the representatives of the people against Mr. Hastings, and carried on before the supreme tribunal of the nation.

In the long examination of Mr. Middleton, he gave decided proofs of a strong and discriminating mind; but when, in June 1788, he summed up the evidence on the charge, respecting the confinement and imprisonment of the Princesses of Oude, and the seizure of their treasures, his superiority over his colleagues was established by universal consent. His mind, indeed, appears to have been elevated by the importance of the subject; and he conceived its various relations with a perspicuity that was embellished by the noblest effusions of eloquence—

« Animo vidit; ingenio complexus est;

Eloquentia ornavit. »

But however admirable his speech may be now considered, as a composition, there were, at that time, several circumstances of magnitude and singularity, that conspired to give it a celebrity, which posterity will scarcely admit it to possess. To form a just opinion of this memorable oration, which occupied the attention of the court for five hours, and excited the admiration of the public, it would be necessary to have heard Mr. Sheridan himself; and, to those who have not witnessed

the correctness, strength, and animation of his elocution, it will be sufficient to repeat what was said by Eschines to the people of Rhodes, in praise of the oration which had caused his banishment — « What applauses would you not have conferred, had you heard Demosthenes deliver it himself? »

It is difficult to select any part of it as the subject of peculiar encomium. The address, with which he arranged his materials; the art and force with which he anticipated objections; the unexampled ingenuity with which he commented on the evidence, and the natural boldness of his imagery, are equally entitled to panegyric. He combined the three kinds of eloquence. He was clear and unadorned — diffuse and pathetic — animated and vehement. There was nothing superfluous — no affected turn — no glittering point — no false sublimity. Compassion and indignation were alternately excited, and the wonderful effects related of the eloquence of Greece and Rome were almost revived.

Soon after this great æra in the public life of Mr. Sheridan, the deplorable indisposition of his Majesty, which plunged the country into a state of the deepest distress, led to the discussion of a question, exceeding in political magnitude every other national occurrence from the revolution of 1688 down to that time. The ministry and opposition essentially differed with respect to the

means to be adopted for supplying the defect of the personal exercise of the royal authority, and Mr. Sheridan took a leading part in the attempts which were made to declare the Prince of Wales regent, without such restrictions as Parliament should think fit to impose. The favour in which he was held at Carleton-house was certainly superior to that enjoyed by the most distinguished members of the party, and his conduct occasioned suspicions that have never been completely removed. His Royal Highness was very much in the habit of consulting Mr. Sheridan, and his answer to Mr. Pitt's letter, with respect to the restrictions on the regency, which was allowed to be dignified, cautious, and temperate, has been principally ascribed to the prudent counsels of this gentleman.

Mr. Sheridan's strenuous support at this time, of what he chose to call the rights of the heir apparent, in opposition to the rights of the people, as residing in their representatives, how much soever he may dignify it with the title of gratitude to his patron, can never be regarded by the real friends of the constitution, but as a glaring dereliction of the principles with which he commenced his political career. The spirit of party, and the strong prejudices of the moment being now consigned to oblivion, it may be fairly asked, whether he, or any other declared advocate of the rights of the people, acted consistently in opposing the following resolution,

which was proposed by Mr. Pitt, and passed by the British Parliament:

« Resolved, That it is the opinion of this committee, that it is the right and duty of the Lords spiritual and temporal, and Commons of Great Britain, now assembled, and lawfully, fully, and freely representing all the estates of the people of this realm, to provide the means of supplying the defect of the personal exercise of the Royal Authority, arising from his Majesty's indisposition, in such a manner as the exigency of the case may appear to require. »

Mr. Sheridan's objection to the resolution did not arise from any statement contained in it, respecting the *full* and *free* representation of the people, but he and his friends argued against the power of both houses, in any case, to limit the authority of the regent, and contended, that the immediate nomination of the heir-apparent ought to take place, as a matter of constitutional right. Those who are sincere admirers of the British Constitution, as derived from the legitimate source of authority, will never be brought to coincide in the doctrines advanced upon the occasion, by the leading members of opposition. But the prospect of approaching power can quiet the most conscientious scruples, and silence statements that would otherwise have been proclaimed as the inalienable rights of Englishmen, and the palladium of public security.

The illness of the king proved however of much shorter duration than was expected, or even wished for, by the ambitious projects of Mr. Sheridan and his colleagues; for at the very moment when the conclusion of the regency settlement seemed to hold forth to them the loaves and fishes, his Majesty's recovery removed the savoury sight, and left the hungry expectants in the ranks of a dejected opposition.

When towards the close of the year 1791, the gigantic ambition of Mr. Pitt had formed the bond of union and cooperation with nearly all the great European powers, against France and French liberty; Mr. Sheridan was one of the very few representatives in the house of commons, who had the courage boldly to stand forward and set before the eyes of his countrymen, the calamities and disgraces which such a mad crusade could not fail to entail upon Great Britain. His admonitions it is too well known proved fruitless; the war broke out, and soon justified the apprehensions of its opponents. Here it is a justice we owe to the character of Mr. Sheridan to declare, that during the whole of that dreadful contest, he never ceased to deprecate its continuance, and was ever the first to support the motions of those who wished to bring about a reconciliation between the belligerent powers. On every other occasion too, unconnected with the war, that arose during its continuance, it gives us pleasure

to add, he never once forgot his duty to his country, or his fidelity to his sovereign. Not a single question of political magnitude arose which he did not illumine by the depth of his genius, or simplify by the acuteness of his discrimination; this was more particularly exemplified in every important discussion relative to constitutional subjects, and even when the dry calculations of finance came before the house in the shape of a budget or a committee of ways and means, there was no man more forward in detecting the false statements of the minister, or so happy in exposing them as himself. Mr. Sheridan likewise eagerly seized every occasion of manifesting himself a zealous supporter of parliamentary reform, of the liberty of the press and religious toleration. On the other side he did not level himself to the selfish drudgery of a mere partizan, but on more than one occasion proved that when the salvation of Great Britain was at stake, he knew no other party but that of the country. This was particularly instanced at the time of the naval mutiny, when his spirited conduct not only received the thanks of the chancellor of the exchequer, but drew on him the applause of the whole nation.

In the year 1801, when Mr. Pitt found that even his extraordinary talents failed in devising new resources for carrying on the war, or alledging even a single feasible reason for its continuance; when he slunk behind the curtain, leaving the

reins of the state in the hands of his underlings, when the only claim such men could have to the patience of the nation was the relieving it from the intolerable grievances of a ten years war, it was not to be expected that Mr. Sheridan would remain silent, or oppose an accommodation when he had so long inculcated the absolute necessity of it. He accordingly came forward, and with the whole of the friends with whom he had acted, gave a full and hearty acquiescence to the peace, which, « although neither glorious nor honourable for Great Britain, inasmuch as she did not attain any one of the objects for which she professed to have commenced the war, « was, » as Mr. Sheridan remarked, « as good as « from existing circumstances she had a right to « expect. »

Mr. Sheridan's political conduct has hitherto, with a single exception, been entitled to our warmest commendations, and happy should we feel ourselves to record that the sequel of it has borne the same stamp; but impartiality calls upon us too imperiously, for us to refuse obeying her dictates.

That Mr. Sheridan should continue to support a peace, to which he had given his unqualified approbation, and that he should firmly oppose an infraction of it, are circumstances that follow in the natural order of events, but for which he is nevertheless entitled to the approbation of every

true lover of his country. When Mr. Sheridan however, after opposing that infraction, supports the war to which it gave rise, every man of integrity and independence must condemn his conduct. When we cast our eyes over the administration of shreds and patches which Mr. Pitt left behind him, and which still continues to shed their baleful influence over a once happy land, the very scum and offals of an administration which Mr. Sheridan so energetically opposed ever since he commenced his political career, between whom and himself there can consequently be no common tie of talents, genius, or politics; it is impossible to suppress our astonishment and indignation; if to this circumstance we add that he has joined them in support of a war, the injustice of which is acknowledged throughout every country in Europe, but in none more so than in Great Britain itself, what can solve such a political enigma, but... corruption. It is not necessary for Mr. Sheridan to occupy any post or office to receive an emolument for... his support, we were going to say, silence; for so much does he appear ashamed of his associates, that he has almost lost the powers of utterance ever since he has been in their company. The civil list is enormous, and as when a man consents to forfeit the well-earned reputation of a whole life; when he consents to abandon his old friends, and yet... blushes to acknowledge his new ones, such a sacrifice, we

conclude, must have met with . . . no common recompense.

Mr. Sheridan's voice is strong and distinct, but his delivery is often precipitate, and his manner unimportant. He wants the dignity of Mr. Pitt, and the fire of Mr. Fox; but, in the ingenuity of observation, and the felicity of reply, he is not inferior to either of them in their happiest moments. He excels in raillery, which, at once elegant and severe, is peculiarly suited to the senate. Though he seems cautiously to avoid the use of figurative diction and splendid imagery in his speeches, his celebrated oration on the trial of Mr. Hastings is an ample testimony of his ability to introduce them with the most appropriate effect.

It cannot be denied, that his propensity to epigrammatic point and humorous allusion frequently exceeds the bounds of propriety, and hurries him to a levity of remark that is at variance with the gravity of the subject in discussion. We laugh indeed for the moment, but soon condemn the speaker for trifling with a great object of national consideration. When, for instance, on the motion for repealing the Act for Suspending the Habeas Corpus Act, and on the measure for arming the country, in consequence of his Majesty's message, he has talked of « an army of six men, commanded by a taylor, and encamped in a back-garret, » and of « foraging

in fruit-shops, parading in Piccadilly, and taking the field in Rotten row; »—who can avoid condemning what certainly is not authorized by the artifice, much less by the art, of eloquence? The rules of public conduct, like the laws of the drama, are founded in consistency; and with the latter Mr. Sheridan cannot be unacquainted,—

« Singula quæque locum teneant sortita decenter ».

There has appeared of late in his speeches a negligence that is evidently caused by momentary indolence, or the want of previous application; and the observation made by the first statesman of the country, that, « however greatly he admired the talents of Mr. Sheridan, he was confident, that gentleman might exert them with more effect, » is perfectly correct. « Honied assent, so pleasant to the taste of man, » has ever been peculiarly grateful to Mr. Sheridan's feelings, and a cheer from the opposition bench, excited by some brilliant effusion of wit, has often suppressed in him any farther display of ability in debate. He had gained what he so much courted, and he resolved to preserve it undiminished.

Mrs. Sheridan died in June, 1792. and he has a son by that lady, who possesses considerable abilities. In 1795, he married Miss Ogle, youngest daughter of the Reverend Doctor Newton Ogle, Dean of Winchester. The issue of his second marriage is also a son,

Of the integrity and honour of Mr. Sheridan in private life, report speaks unfavourably (1). His

(1) A punctual paymaster is a character to which of all others Mr. Sheridan is the least entitled, and the evasions and tricks he has recourse to with his creditors, have more than once involved him in a disagreeable dilemma. It was not very long since he was waited on by his wine merchant *in person*, to settle a large balance of many years standing, for which the clerk had been for a long time dunning him to no purpose. As the wine merchant had resolved to call at much too early an hour for Mr. Sheridan to have gone out, he received for answer that Mr. S. *was not up*. « Good, » replied he to the servant, « then if you will let me sit down, I'll stop till *he does get up*. » The servant could not well refuse so modest a request, and accordingly shewed the gentleman into a back parlour. Mr. S. was no sooner informed of what was going on, than he perceived the trap that was laid for him, and resolved to take advantage of it; accordingly after breakfasting perfectly at his ease, he left the house, went to the wine merchant's, being sure of not meeting him at home, and seeing the clerk, told him, he wished the wine might be sent in immediately, as he had some friends at home waiting to taste it. « What wine, » said the clerk? « Why, a pipe of old Port, I ordered in of your master two hours ago, and which was to have been sent by this time. » The clerk, who knew his master was gone to Mr. S.'s for the amount of his bill, now made no doubt but the latter had discharged it, and accordingly sent him a pipe of the oldest Port in the cellars, immediately. By the time it was safe in Mr. Sheridan's possession, the wine merchant, wearied out at length with stopping, thought proper to ring the bell, and inquire if Mr. S. was coming down soon. « Lord bless me, » replied the servant, who had previously received his cue, « I beg your

conduct too as manager and principal proprietor of the first theatre in the kingdom, and his punctuality in the discharge of the duties contracted by him in that situation, have rarely been the subject of praise.

In private life, Mr. Sheridan is one of the most entertaining and instructive companions in the kingdom. His conversation abounds in witty similitudes, humorous allusions, and lively repartee; and when any subject of enlarged investigation is brought forward, the treasures of general learning, with which he has stored his mind, are proportionate to the exigency of the moment. It is, perhaps, in the knowledge of human nature that he surpasses all his contemporaries. His sagacity has been particularly exercised in discovering the character and propensities of his acquaintances, or of those with whom he has any business to transact, and he generally succeeds in converting this kind of knowledge to his own advantage.

pardon, but master has been gone out for a long while. » The merchant damned him for a stupid fellow, and, on his return home, found himself L. 90 *minus*, by the transport of his wine.

Enraged at having been thus duped, he sent a note to Mr. Sheridan, informing him, that if he were not paid the amount of his bill, (this pipe of wine included,) immediately, he would have him taken up for swindling. Mr. Sheridan's promises and intreaties were alike ineffectual, and had not his friends paid the money, he would have been left in a most awkward situation.

After a retirement of twenty years from the stage, Mr. Sheridan came forward, at the end of the season in 1799, in the humble situation of the editor of Kotzebue, the celebrated German dramatist, and appears, in that instance, to have been more actuated by his interest as a manager, than by the generous feelings of a writer, emulous of lasting fame. To gratify the public taste for scenes of exquisite sensibility, supported by incidents, sometimes impossible, and, in almost every case, improbable; and, to strengthen the exhibition by the attractions of striking machinery, scenic grandeur, and appropriate music, was evidently the object which he had in view in that strange degradation of superior talents. The pressing wants of the theatre, and of those dependent upon its success, called for instantaneous relief, and the most likely mode of procuring it was an unqualified compliance with popular absurdity.

« For we who live to please, must please to live ».
is the only apology he can make for the prostitution of his muse.

It should seem, that Mr. Sheridan had altogether forgotten his having written the *Critic*; for there are very few scenes or passages in *Pizarro*, which can escape the just satire and humorous ridicule contained in that production. He has,

indeed, condescended, in his alteration of the *Death of Rolla*, to revive the character of the ingenious Mr. *Puff*; for the most prejudiced mind must feel how very pointedly Mr. Sheridan's observations in the Critic apply to the favourite tragedy of Pizarro : — « Now then for my magnificence ! my battle ! my noise ! and my procession ! — Smaller things must give way to a striking scene at the opening; that's the rule. — A play is not to shew occurrences that happen every day, but things just so strange, that though they never did, they might, happen. » But the criticisms of Mr. Sheridan were no longer remembered; sound and show triumphed over common sense; the numerous admirers of sensibility, tortured to excess, were gratified; the votaries of pompous exhibition and romance were indulged in their favourite passion; and Pizarro, with all its defects, recommended by the joint reputation of Kotzebue and Sheridan, attracted more numerous and fashionable audiences than have ever attended an English theatre.

The speech of Rolla, exhorting the Peruvians to defend their king and country, their civil and religious institutions, against a ferocious band of lawless invaders, was highly instrumental to the success of the piece; and it is the only passage of the play to which Mr. Sheridan has an exclusive claim. The appeal to the people in support of their rights and national independence is bold and ani-

mating. The striking image of the vulture and the lamb, is, however, used with more effect in his speech on the impeachment of Mr. Hastings; but his right to borrow from himself cannot be questioned.

Mr. Sheridan must be convinced, that, with the exception of Rolla's patriotic harangue, Pizarro is more indebted for its popularity to the merits of the original, to the actor, the machinist, the painter, and the composer, than to any alterations he has made, or to any judgment he has evinced in adapting it to the English stage. It is to be lamented, that he has, by this motley exhibition, degraded his reputation as the first dramatic writer of the country, and sunk himself to a level with the play-wrights of the day, to whom profit is every thing, and fame nothing. It remains for him to shake off that indolence, which appears to have become constitutional, and make a satisfactory atonement, by some work of genius, for his mercenary conduct in confirming the vitiated state of public taste, against which he contended in 1779, with so much energy and success.

ANOTHER CHARACTER OF M^r. SHERIDAN.

In expatiating the vast field of humanity, we must again lament how seldom is to be found a coalition of extraordinary genius and talents, with superior moral excellence.

When we attempted a sketch of Col. Fitzpatrick, we had not at the moment this gentleman within our recollection, to whom the palm of genius undoubtedly belongs.

Whether considered as a statesman, or an orator, an author, or a manager, he equally commands our admiration.

A man so various, that he seems to be,
Not one, but all mankind's epitome (1).

—————In one revolving moon,

A statesman, poet, fidler, and buffoon;

Tho' wondering senates, hung on all he spoke,

The club still hails him master of the joke (2)

Although elected into parliament, under every disadvantage of character and of prejudice against him, wholly destitute of connections, he surmounted every difficulty, and by dint of abilities alone, extorted the attention and wonder of all who heard him: his close sagacious penetration enabled him very soon to acquire a knowledge of parliamentary usages; and every subject of political discussion, seems equally fami-

(1) Dryden.

(2) Pope.

liar to him. Even on matters, where, from education and habit, one should suppose him the most ignorant, he displays a superiority, and the Chancellor of the Exchequer never opens a budget, without smarting under the rod of that piercing satire, and perspicuity of language, which never fails to expose his financial errors, and false statements, in the most glaring point of view.

If considered as an orator, we have only to recollect his oration against the great Oriental Delinquent, which, notwithstanding its excessive length, never suffered the attention of his auditors to flag, and which roused and animated lethargy itself (1). If Cicero excited the indignation of the Roman people, by dint of his eloquence, against the infamous Verres, Mr. Sheridan was no less successful in his harangue on that occasion, which distanced all competition (2).

As an author, without dwelling on the beauty or ingenuity of his minor productions, we shall only remark, that his Monody on the death of Garrick, is equal to any thing of the kind, and

(1) See Hastings's Trial. Part Second.

(2) From our observation, during the last Sessions of parliament, Mr. Sheridan appears no longer inspired with the same ardour and enthusiasm; and calumnious reports are in circulation, which we hope the sequel of his conduct will refute.

his plays are unquestionably the chef-d'œuvres of modern dramatic productions.

In his professional capacity, as managing the internal œconomy of the theatre, his good sense and liberal policy, serve admirably to counteract the contracted system, and niggardly parsimony of his mother-in-law; and the success hitherto experienced, justifies the most sanguine opinion of his theatrical speculations. Indeed, it is unnatural to suppose, that a person of such intellectual endowments, should not prosper in every enterprise, in the behalf of which, he finds it his interest to apply his labour and abilities.

Notwithstanding the number of engagements which occupy this gentleman, still he is far from being wholly devoted to business. In the career of pleasure, he proceeds at least *passibus æquis*. In the pursuit of voluptuous enjoyments, although his face and person are much bloated and disfigured by his nocturnal orgies, and frequent bacchanalian sacrifices, his address and ingenuity surmount every physical disadvantage; and his amours are not of that sordid, low description, which most of his friends are so eager to cultivate.

Received in all the highest circles of the fashionable world, he finds it not difficult to turn his accomplishments to the best advantage. It is there, where lust and debauchery are as predominant as in the brothels of Drury or Whitecha-

pel : the sole difference consisting in the artificial refinement and hypocrisy that conceal them.

We have surveyed the fair side of Mr. Sheridan's character, and; *oh ! si fit omnia* : but justice and truth demand our obedience ; we must therefore present the contrast.

In domestic life, this gentleman is not so happy. Mutual jealousy and family bickerings poison the source of that connection, which might otherwise yield all possible felicity. Where there are such talents, and accomplishments on both sides, unless counterbalanced by some singular spirit of contradiction, the connubial state must necessarily ensure happiness ; but few persons know the foundation on which their true happiness rests ; hence, they neglect their most solid interests.

In his dealings with the world, he is negligent and unprincipled ; without regard for the sufferings of others ; inattentive to punctuality, and heedless of the vexation and disappointment that he occasions to those who have the justest and most indispensable claims upon him, he sacrifices every duty, rather than submit to the least temporary inconvenience. A bad paymaster, many a miserable tradesman imprecates curses on his head ; and what aggravates the crime beyond measure, is, that we have reason to believe his circumstances infinitely more affluent than he labours to represent them. No principle of honour or conscience restrains him, when it appears

contrary to what he deems his advantage; and the present unhappy situation of his copartner Dr. F——d is imputed to him. In a moral sense, we are under the necessity of strongly reprobating this gentleman; but he stands on a very critical and exalted eminence, and the public have expectations from his political rectitude. We would not therefore irritate him, by probing his failings too sorely, and he may make ample atonement for them all, by exerting his various and commanding talents, to effect such a reform in the government of this country, as can alone establish its permanent happiness and glory. He is said to possess the confidence of a great Prince, and although different habits may preclude any very great intimacy in social life, yet it is to be hoped, that he will neglect no occasion of instilling those popular principles, which he has himself avowed, into the mind of the person in question. The auspicious day may come, when it will be in his power to reduce a regular and beautiful system into practice. Mr. Sheridan has hitherto evinced no versatility or inconsistency in his political principles. He was one of those who submitted to, but did not approve, the coalition. He has uniformly and zealously asserted the rights of the people; and as, in point of judgment, knowledge, and experience, he stands unrivalled; so it is to be expected, he will turn them to the best account, by rendering them beneficial to a nation,

whence he derives such signal advantages; and infamous indeed would it be, were he then to shrink from his duty, and compromise the dearest interests of a nation, to adulate the passions, or feed the prejudices of a Prince. It may be presumed, that Mr. Sheridan will act in a manner more worthy of his exalted genius; that he will be animated by nobler and more generous motives; and, whatever his private foibles may be, that, disdaining the ignoble path of servility, which the venal herd of favourites have hitherto pursued, he will point out a new and striking example, by enforcing the practice of public virtue, the memory of which must be an eternal source of ineffable satisfaction and delight to himself, and of real honour and glory to his friend. Hence, he will be adored while living, and his name enrolled on the register of immortality, amongst the most distinguished patriots and benefactors of mankind.

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Characters of W. Pitt and R. B. Sheridan

Paris 1804

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